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ABSTRACT

The Kindergarten Transition Project at the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) has developed a school-based approach designed to enhance connections among children, families, teachers, and peers during the transition to kindergarten. This report excerpts from a paper describing this approach to ease transition. The paper describes how the program was developed and delineates program activities for strengthening family-school connections, child-school connections, peer connections, and program connections. Suggestions for family-school connections include organizing an informal dinner with parents and kindergarten teachers in conjunction with school open houses or back-to-school nights. Suggestions for child-school connections include providing opportunities for children to interact directly with their anticipated kindergarten teachers. Suggestions for peer connections include identifying a current kindergartner to serve as a "buddy" to a preschooler. One suggestion for enhancing program connections is to arrange discussions between preschool and kindergarten personnel about classroom practices and specific needs of individual children. (KB)

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NCEDL Spotlights

No. 17 December 1999

An Approach to Enhance Kindergarten Transition

Following are excerpts from "Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten: Connecting Families and Schools" by Marcia Kraft-Sayre & Robert Pianta, both at the University of Virginia. The article is in press for *Dimensions of Early Childhood.*

Approach emphasizes family-school connections, collaboration

THE KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PROJECT at NCEDL has developed a school-based approach designed to enhance connections among children, families, teachers and peers during the transition to kindergarten. These connections can be important supports to children and families during this period of change and reflect recent attempts to describe what "ready schools" can do to ease transitions (National Education Goals Panel, 1997).

Activities are intended to increase familiarity with school, provide for consistent expectations between home and school, and make children and families more comfortable interacting with school.

In addition, these relationships enable kindergarten teachers to more easily, and earlier, use the resources of families to support children's competence in school.

How We Developed Program

We collaborated with preschools, elementary schools, a summer pre-kindergarten program, and parents to learn about current transition practices, and then cooperatively designed a set of activities to foster positive transition experiences. These activities affected family-school connections, child-school connections, peer connections and connections between programs.

Regular meetings were held with teachers, family support workers, and principals to discuss factors that enhanced or hindered these kindergarten transition activities. In addition, families were asked about their experiences with their children's transition to kindergarten.

Recommended Activities

A package of activities affecting many connections—child-teacher, family-teacher, child-peer, and others—is more likely to support a successful transition, than any one activity alone. For example, children in one school system are enrolled in preschool with peers with whom they will go to elementary school.

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Family/School Connections

- Arrange a time for parents to meet with the preschool and kindergarten teachers to discuss the expectations of kindergarten and their children's specific needs.
- Organize an informal dinner with parents and kindergarten teachers in conjunction with school open houses or back to school nights.
- Place children with kindergarten teachers who taught their older siblings to build upon pre-existing family-teacher bonds.
- Encourage families to engage their children in literacy activities at home, such as reading together.

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(Recommended activities.....continued from front)

By arranging with elementary school principals and teachers for these children to be in the same kindergarten classroom together, peer relationships developed in preschool can be carried over into kindergarten.

Several preschools promote family-school connections by providing family support services. A family support worker, who is assigned to the preschool and elementary school, meets regularly with families in their homes, connects them to community resources when needed, provides opportunities for involvement in groups to discuss shared interests and address transition issues, and works to engage families in positive relationships with school.

Meetings between parents and kindergarten teachers before the onset of kindergarten, are arranged by the teacher and family support worker to help establish parent-teacher communication.

An additional connection involves linking pre-kindergarten children with their anticipated elementary school through opportunities for rising kindergarten children to visit their classroom in the spring before their kindergarten year.

Familiarizing children with their kindergarten teacher and specific classroom activities *prior* to school entry, in conjunction with a number of other transition activities, reduces uncertainty for the child.

Finally, perhaps the most important activity to enhance kindergarten transitions has been our collaborative group meetings where key players in the transition process—the teachers, principals, and family workers—all work together.

These meetings allow discussion of problems and solutions and build connections among program staff. For example, preschool and kindergarten staff, with the mutually shared goal of having preschool peers together in kindergarten, are working together to achieve this goal when kindergarten placement decisions are made.

Collaboration in Fundamental

Collaboration with everyone involved is fundamental to both the development and implementation of the kindergarten transition program.

Child/School Connections

- Provide opportunities for children to interact directly with their anticipated kindergarten teachers by arranging visits to kindergarten classrooms during story time, center time, recess, or a special school function.
- Familiarize children with their kindergarten teachers by reviewing their names, showing their pictures, and discussing what the kindergarten classroom will be like.
- Orient preschool children to the expectations of kindergarten, discuss the rules for learning and behaving, such as walking in a "kindergarten line."

Peer Connections

- Arrange for children to interact with future kindergarten classmates at preschool or outside the classroom setting.
- Identify a current kindergartner to serve as "buddy" to a preschooler. Plan visits to the kindergarten classroom when the kindergarten "buddy" reads a story, demonstrates how to play a game, or shows the younger child how to use the classroom computer.

Program Connections

- Arrange discussions between preschool and kindergarten personnel about classroom practices and specific needs of individual children.

If you want to know more

Pianta, R. C., & Walsh, D. J. (1996). *High-risk children in schools: Creating sustaining relationships.* New York: Routledge, Kegan-Paul.

Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., & Pianta, R.C. (1999). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten. Manuscript submitted for publication.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Head Start Bureau. (1996). *Effective transition practices: Facilitating continuity: Training guide for the Head Start learning community.* Aspen Systems Corporation.

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For more information, contact Loyd Little at (919) 966-0367 or email loyd_little@unc.edu
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